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ABSTRACT

The statement by Linda G. Morra, Director of Education and Employment Issues in the Health, Education, and Human Services Division, discusses the agency's work on immigrant education and the Emergency Immigrant Education Act (EIEA) Program. The nation's ability to meet its educational goals increasingly depends on its ability to educate immigrant children. More than 2 million immigrant students enrolled in the nation's schools in the last decade, and this growth has increased the financial burden of many school districts. At the same time, contributions under the EIEA have gradually lessened as congressional appropriations have not grown. The General Accounting Office estimates that, of the 700,000 students who have been in our nation's schools less than 3 years, nearly 85 percent are in schools receiving EIEA grants, representing 529 school districts. These districts used about 80 percent of their funds to pay for academic instructional programs, with the balance used for testing, counseling, parent involvement, and administration. Proposed legislative revisions about EIEA funding must be considered in the difficult context of balancing the funds available with areas of greatest need. One figure illustrates the discussion. A list of eight related Government Accounting Office documents is attached. (SLD)

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Committee on Labor and Human Resources
U.S. Senate

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IMMIGRANT EDUCATION

Federal Funding Has Not Kept Pace With Student Increases

Statement of Linda G. Morra, Director
Education and Employment Issues
Health, Education, and Human Services Division

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SUMMARY OF STATEMENT BY
LINDA G. MORRA
ISSUE AREA DIRECTOR, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

Immigrant students can pose significant educational challenges, especially in districts with high numbers of such students. Increasingly, our nation's ability to meet its educational goals depends on its ability to educate these children. More than 2 million immigrant students enrolled in the nation's schools in the last decade.

The geographical concentration of immigrant students has increased the financial burden of many school districts for educating these students. Over time, however, EIEA's contribution to local school districts has gradually lessened as congressional appropriations have remained relatively constant, at about $30 million, while the number of EIEA students has grown.

GAO's March 1991 report Immigrant Education: Information on the Emergency Immigrant Education Act Program discussed (1) how school districts use EIEA funds, (2) how many districts have EIEA-eligible immigrant students but receive no EIEA funds, and (3) how many EIEA students participate in other federal education programs.

As the Congress intended, EIEA funds are provided to districts with large concentrations of immigrant students who have been in our nation's schools for less than 3 complete academic years. In total, GAO estimates that there were 700,000 such students in over 4,500 of our nation's 15,000 school districts during school year 1989-90. Of these 700,000 students, about 564,000 (85 percent) were in the 529 school districts receiving EIEA grants. The remaining 136,000 were dispersed among an estimated 4,000 districts that did not receive EIEA funds.

In school year 1989-90, the 529 school districts participating in the EIEA program used about 80 percent of their EIEA funds to pay for expenses related to academic instructional programs. School districts used the remaining 20 percent for such purposes as student testing and counseling, parental involvement activities, and administrative services. Of the 529 school districts, 341 (65 percent) devoted at least 90 percent of their grants to academic instructional programs.

Proposed legislative revisions about allocating EIEA funding must be considered in a difficult context: immigrant students pose costly and increasing challenges for many districts, but there is little likelihood of substantially increased federal appropriations. H.R. 6 funding provisions run the risk of allowing per student funding to decline to the point that EIEA funding could have little impact. S. 1513 could concentrate needed assistance, but also eliminate funding for many districts that find even small amounts of aid to be critical.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our work on immigrant education and the Emergency Immigrant Education Act (EIEA) Program. Immigrant students can pose significant educational challenges, especially in districts with high numbers of such students. Increasingly, our nation's ability to meet its educational goals depends on its ability to educate these children. More than 2 million immigrant students enrolled in the nation's schools in the last decade. In addition, the geographical concentration of these children has increased the financial burden of some school districts.

As requested by your office, my comments today will primarily focus on our March 1991 report on the EIEA Program.[1] This report was prepared in response to the requirement in Public Law 100-297 for our office to review EIEA-funded programs and provide information for the Congress to consider during program reauthorization deliberations. We surveyed the 529 school districts that received EIEA funds in school year 1989-90 and a representative sample of the nation's school districts not receiving such funds.

Today I will be discussing several key findings: (1) EIEA funds are provided to districts with large numbers of immigrant students, (2) EIEA program funding is not keeping pace with the increasing number of eligible students, and (3) many students eligible for EIEA funds also participate in other federally funded education programs, but estimates are difficult to obtain.

The study findings are relevant to the current deliberations over efforts to reauthorize federally funded education programs in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The EIEA program is one of several federal assistance programs for educationally disadvantaged children authorized by this legislation. Over time, however, EIEA's contribution to local school districts has gradually lessened as congressional appropriations have remained relatively constant, at about $30 million annually, while the number of EIEA students has grown.

H.R. 6, the House of Representatives' version of legislation to reauthorize ESEA programs, was passed on March 24, 1994. This bill would maintain current eligibility criteria for local educational agencies. That is, they would need to have immigrant children and youth enrolled in their elementary and secondary public schools or nonpublic schools within their district equal to at least 500 students or at least 3 percent of the total number of students enrolled in such public or nonpublic schools during the fiscal year for which payments are made. A new provision provides

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[1]Immigrant Education: Information on the Emergency Immigrant Education Act Program (GAO/HRD-91-50, Mar. 15, 1991).

that if annual EIEA appropriations exceed $40 million, a state education agency may reserve up to 20 percent of its payment for redistribution through competitive grants to local education agencies.

Your Subcommittee is currently considering S. 1513, which contains the Administration's proposal to modify the existing EIEA program. Among other things, S. 1513 would increase EIEA program eligibility criteria for a local school district or education agency. In the aggregate, an agency would have had to enroll, over the current school year and the preceding school year, at least 1,000 immigrant children and youth or numbers of immigrant children and youth that represent at least 10 percent of the local education agency's total enrollment.

BACKGROUND

The RAND Corporation's 1993 report[2] on immigrant education describes the United States as experiencing a wave of immigration unprecedented since the early 1900s. The most recent census showed that 9 million people emigrated to the United States during the 1980s and more than 2 million immigrant youth enrolled in U.S. public schools.

In a related study,[3] we found that immigrant students are almost twice as likely to be poor as compared with all students, thereby straining local school resources. These students often have significant health and emotional needs--especially those who have experienced the trauma of war and life in refugee camps. They are highly transient, making continuity in instruction and planning difficult, and they often continue to arrive throughout the school year, contributing, in many cases, to school overcrowding.

Another particularly difficult challenge is the recent arrival of many immigrants, including those of high school age, who have had little or no schooling and are illiterate even in their native languages. And districts face difficulties in communicating with the parents of immigrant students, who often have limited English proficiency long after the students have attained proficiency. In addition, both parents and students struggle to learn a new country's customs.

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[2]Lorraine M. McDonnell and Paul T. Hill, Newcomers in American Schools: Meeting the Educational Needs of Immigrant Youth (Santa Monica, Calif.:RAND, 1993).

[3]See Limited English Proficiency: A Growing and Costly Educational Challenge Facing Many School Districts (GAO/HEHS-94-38, Jan. 28, 1994).

The RAND Corporation study estimated that 78 percent of all immigrant students who have been in the United States for 3 years or less attend school in just five states, with 45 percent enrolled in California. Together, California, New York, Florida, Texas, and Illinois, in order of magnitude, were home to over 1.5 million immigrant youth in 1993.

The Department of Education administers the EIEA program. It distributes EIEA funds to each state, based on the ratio of EIEA-eligible students in the state's qualifying school districts to the total number of EIEA students in the nation. EIEA-eligible students are immigrant students who have been enrolled in our nation's schools for less than 3 complete academic years and are in a school district that received EIEA program funds. The states in turn distribute the funds to each school district in proportion to the number of EIEA students in the district. EIEA authorizes a maximum annual appropriation of $500 for each EIEA student in participating school districts.

EIEA allows school districts wide latitude in using the funds. For example, districts may use them for expenses related to remedial instructional programs (for example, staff salaries) or training for personnel working with immigrant students. Expenses related to English language or bilingual instruction service, the requisition of classroom space, and overhead costs are other examples of allowable costs. School districts can use the funds to benefit any or all of their students, provided the services are related to the educational needs of EIEA students.

EIEA GRANTS ARE MADE TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

We found that, as the Congress intended, EIEA funds were being provided to school districts with large concentrations of immigrant students who have been in our nation's schools for less than 3 complete academic years. In total, we estimate that there were 700,000 such students in over 4,500 of our nation's 15,000 school districts during school year 1989-90. About 564,000 of these 700,000 students were in the 529 school districts receiving EIEA grants. The remaining 136,000 were dispersed among an estimated 4,000 districts.

About 90 percent of these 4,000 districts were ineligible for funds. In each district, there were fewer than 500 EIEA-eligible students and they represented less than 3 percent of the total school population. The remaining 10 percent of these school districts had not applied for funding. Officials from these districts offered several reasons for not applying. Many said they were unaware of the program or thought they were ineligible. Others said they lacked the resources to identify immigrant students.

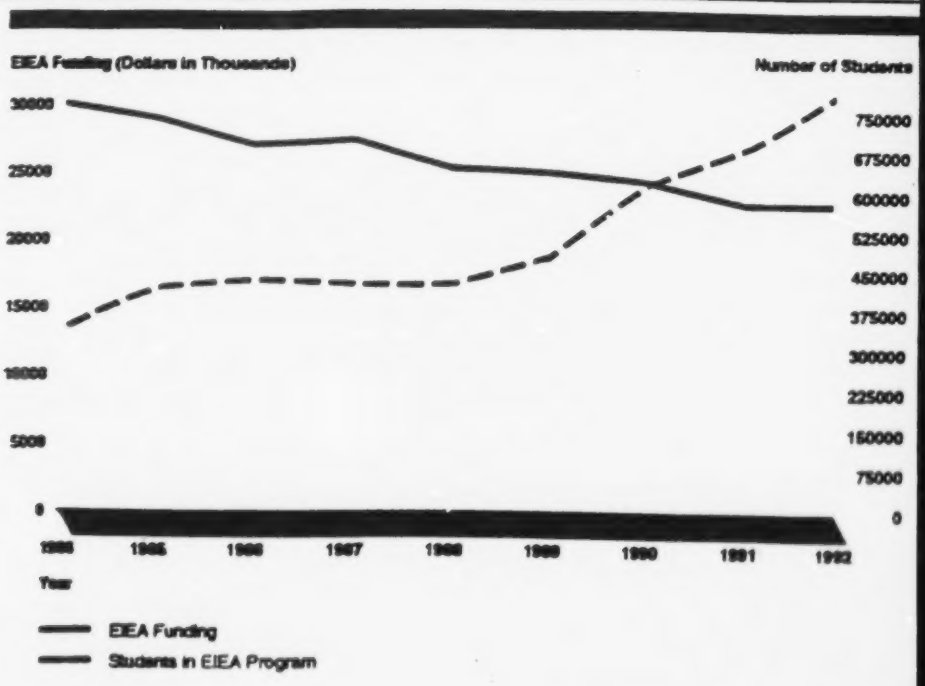
WHO GETS SERVED AND WHAT SERVICES DO THEY RECEIVE?

Through the EIEA program, school districts receive funding for part of the cost of educating immigrant students. As previously mentioned, we estimate that about 564,000 immigrant students were in the 529 participating school districts in school year 1989-90. At the time of our study, 60 percent of these EIEA students were Hispanic and 22 percent were Asian; 90 percent were limited English proficient; and 60 percent were elementary grade students.

The Congress has annually appropriated about $30 million since the inception of the EIEA program in fiscal year 1984. This funding level has never come close to the total authorized amount of $500 per student. With the program's appropriation remaining relatively constant and the number of participating EIEA students increasing, the per student allocation has declined dramatically over the years. In school year 1984-85, for example, participating school districts received about $86 per EIEA student, but this per student allocation had declined in constant 1984 dollars to $27 in school year 1993-94.

Figure 1 shows the decline in funding and increase in immigrant students from 1984 through 1992.

Figure 1: EIEA Funding Has Declined, in Constant Dollars, While Number of Immigrants Increased



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Most EIEA Funds Used for Classroom-Related Activities, Primarily Staff Salaries

In school year 1989-90, we found that school districts used about 80 percent of their EIEA funds to pay for expenses related to academic instructional programs. School districts used the remaining 20 percent for such purposes as student testing and counseling (4 percent), parental involvement activities (4 percent), administrative services (5 percent), and miscellaneous expenses (7 percent).

Most of the EIEA funds supporting academic instructional programs were used for staff salaries and benefits. Of the approximately $25 million used for instructional programs, about $19 million (76 percent) was spent on salaries and benefits for teachers or aides. Of the remaining $6 million, $4 million was used to purchase classroom supplies and materials, $1 million was spent on in-service training, and the remaining $1 million was spent on either instructional equipment or miscellaneous costs.

Of the 529 school districts, 341 (65 percent) devoted at least 90 percent of their grants to academic instructional programs. About 91 percent of the school districts provided English language instruction with EIEA funds. Most school districts receiving EIEA funds (413, or 79 percent) had a bilingual education program, and most of these districts (334, or 81 percent) used EIEA funds for immigrant education support.

About 5 percent of the school districts used their EIEA funds to provide instructional and other services outside the normal school day or year. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District, which had the nation's largest EIEA student population in school year 1989-90, used all its EIEA funds to provide 120 hours of intensive English language development and health and counseling services to newly arrived immigrant students. The district offered the program during the summer to EIEA students enrolled in schools observing the traditional 9-month school year and between sessions for EIEA students enrolled in year-round schools. This program was supported almost entirely with EIEA funds.

Both EIEA and non-EIEA students can participate in the EIEA-funded instructional programs. About 48 percent of the school districts used EIEA funds to serve EIEA students exclusively, like Los Angeles. Another 39 percent served nonimmigrant, limited English proficient students, in addition to serving EIEA students. For example, Dade County merged its EIEA funds with state, local, and other federal funds into one account devoted to its bilingual education department. The remaining 13 percent put their EIEA funds into their general operating funds to provide services that benefit all of their students.

ESTIMATES OF EIEA STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN OTHER FEDERAL PROGRAMS VARY BY PROGRAM

Using school district data, we estimated the number of EIEA students participating in the other federal education programs we reviewed. These included the Chapter 1 Program for Educationally Disadvantaged Children, the Chapter 1 Program for Migrant Children, the Bilingual Education Act (title VII) Program, the State Legalization Impact Assistance Grants Program, and the Transition Program for Refugee Children.

School district officials were unable to tell us exactly how many of their EIEA students participate in other federal education programs. District officials told us that they generally only maintain lists of participants in individual programs. Estimates were, however, that 50 to 66 percent of EIEA students also participated in the Chapter 1 Program for Educationally Disadvantaged Children and from 19 to 31 percent of the EIEA students also participated in the Bilingual Education Act (title VII) Program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EIEA PROGRAM REAUTHORIZATION

Proposed legislative revisions about allocating EIEA funding must be considered in a difficult context: immigrant students pose costly and increasing challenges for many districts but there is little likelihood of substantially increased federal appropriations. In this context, leaving the formula as it is now, as the recently passed House bill does, runs the risk of allowing per student funding to decline to the point that it could have little impact. But changing the formula to concentrate funds, such as proposed in S. 1513, presents a difficult trade-off. It could focus assistance on those districts most heavily affected by immigrant students and increase the likelihood that funding would have an impact in those districts. However, it would also eliminate funding for many districts that find even small amounts of aid to be critical in educating immigrant students.

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Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions that you or members of the Subcommittee might have.

RELATED GAO PRODUCTS

Elementary School Children: Many change Schools Frequently, Harming Their Education (GAO/HEHS-94-45, Feb. 4, 1994).

Limited English Proficiency: A Growing and Costly Educational Challenge Facing Many School Districts (GAO/HEHS-94-38, Jan. 28, 1994).

School Age Demographics: Recent Trends Pose New Educational Challenges (GAO/HRD-93-105BR, Aug. 5, 1993).

Poor Preschool-Aged Children: Numbers Increase but Most Not in Preschool (GAO/HRD-93-111BR, Jul. 21, 1993).

Systemwide Education Reform: Federal Leadership Could Facilitate District-Level Efforts (GAO/HRD-93-97, Apr. 30, 1993).

Immigrant Education: Information on the Emergency Immigrant Education Act Program (GAO/HRD-91-50, Mar. 15, 1991).

Bilingual Education: Information on Limited English Proficient Students (GAO/HRD-87-85BR, Apr. 30, 1987).

Bilingual Education: A New Look at the Research Evidence (GAO/PEMD-87-12BR, Mar. 10, 1987).

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